Wolf's Head

By Von Allan

Issue 13

By Von Allan

Edited by Sam Boswell

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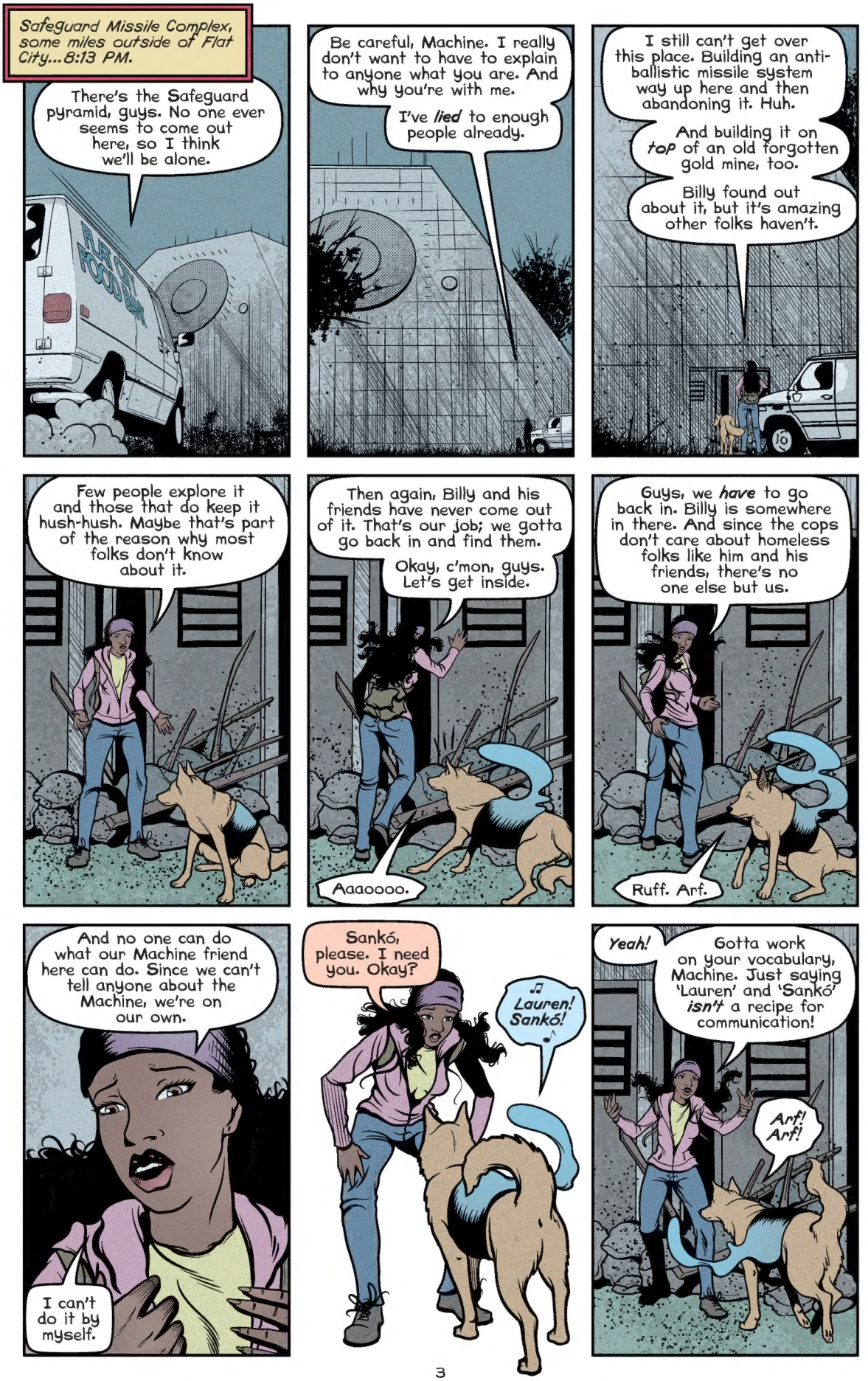
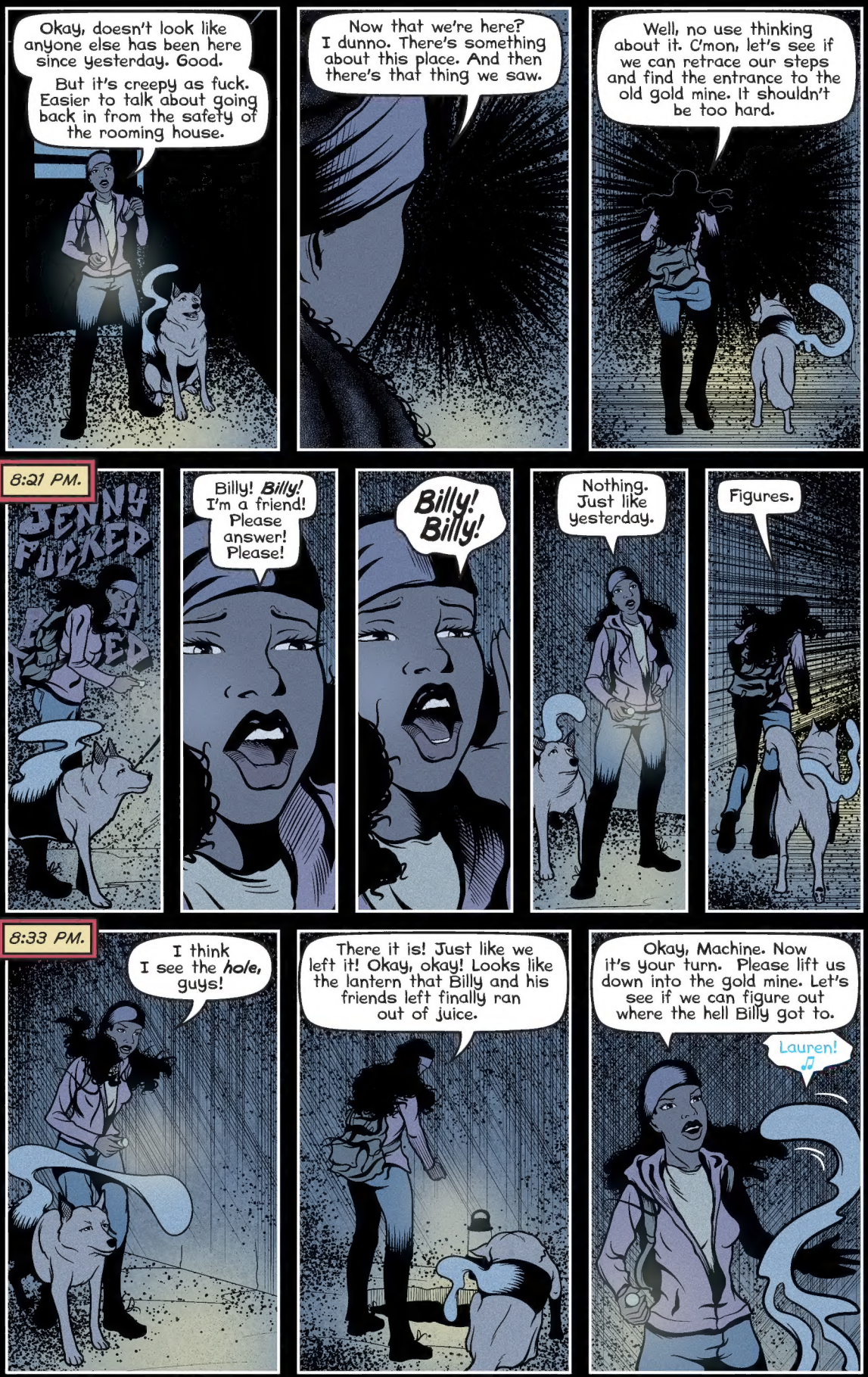
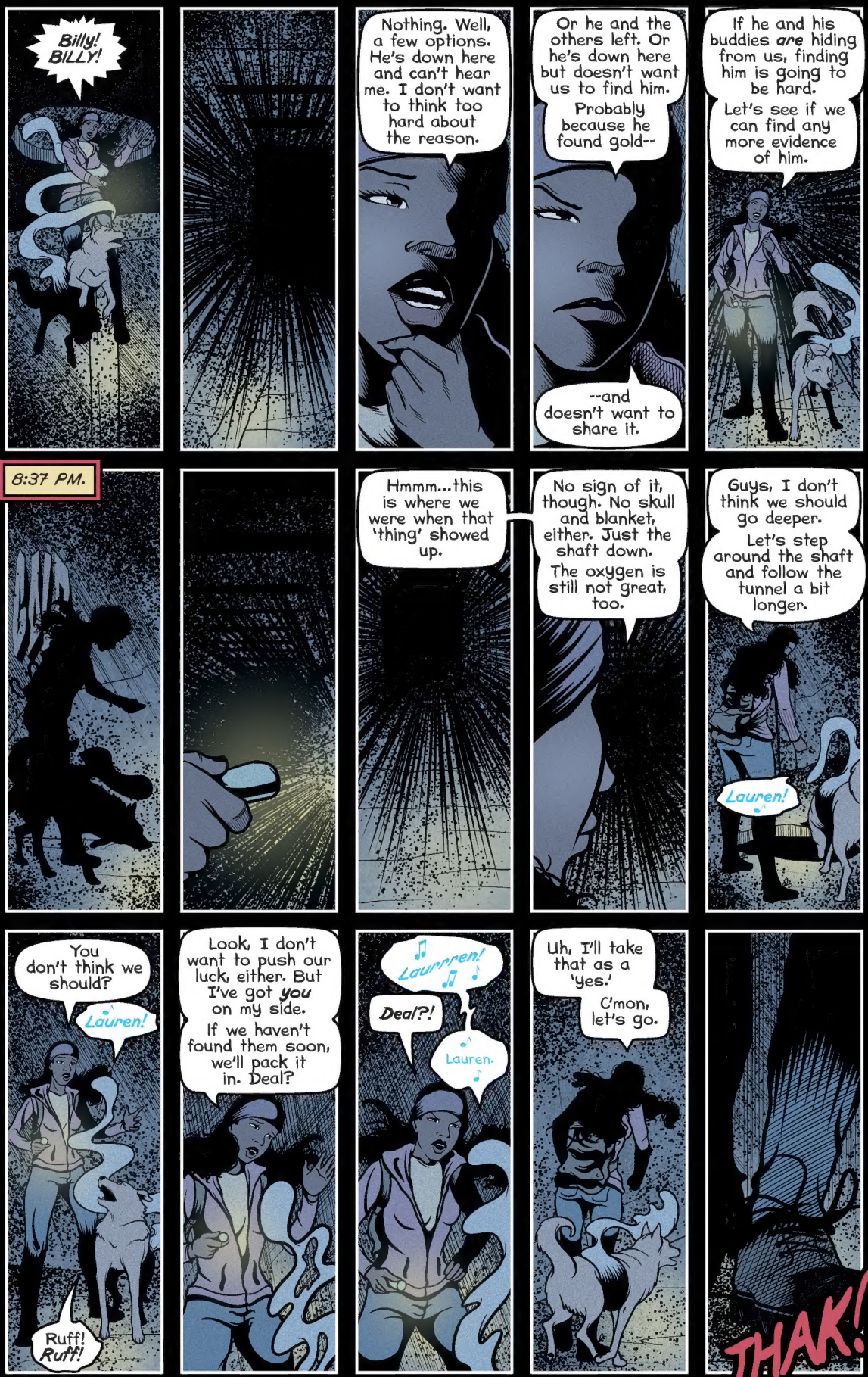
The Bored Humor Rooming House, 75 Beaton Street, Flat City, Alaska. September 9th, 2018. 7:20 PM.
That's it, Machine! I was a bit worried about you after yesterday's adventure*, but you don't seem to be having any issues.
Mind you, a super duper shape-changing artificial intelligence is a bit hard to slow down, right?
Ruff! Arruff!
Lauren!
Same goes for Sankó up there, though going into that old gold mine scared him quite a bit.
* See last issue - V.

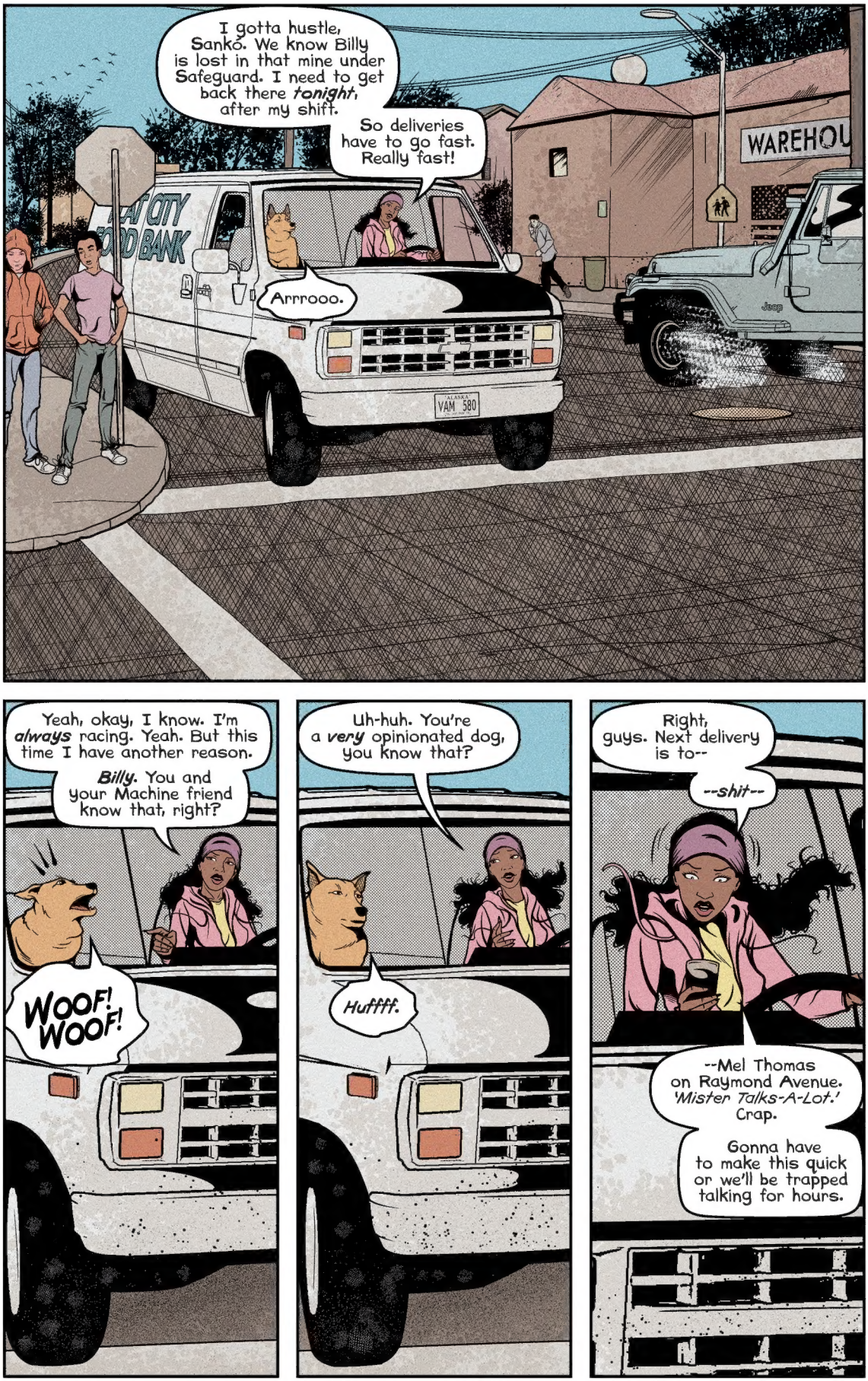
Scared me, too, but we all got through it okay.
Except for my scraped-up knee. It hurts, but could have been much worse.
Okay, with today's Food Bank deliveries out of the way, we can head back to the gold mine.
Whew, I scrambled to get them done, but that should give us plenty of time to explore.
Ruff!
So, we have two mysteries to solve.
One, where the hell did Billy and his friends wind up?
We proved that they went into the mine, but we had no luck finding them. So where are they?
Two, what the hell did we encounter down there? It was getting hard to breathe, so I'm really wondering if it was all in my head.
But you two saw it, too, right? I know you did.
'Course, talking with you two about it is just about impossible.
So...it was real, but it just couldn't be what it looked like.
Maybe it was Billy dressed up? That's probably it. Only way to find out is to go back and see what we can find.
This time, though, we're going in prepared.
Got my backpack. Got plenty of water. Got some food. Spare batteries. First aid kit. Even a spare flashlight.
I can't afford a breathing apparatus like firefighters use, so we'll have to be careful on that front.
Still, we're as ready as we'll ever be.
Machine, please hide now!


Safeguard Missile Complex, some miles outside of Flat City...8:13 PM.
There's the Safeguard pyramid, guys. No one ever seems to come out here, so I think we'll be alone.
Be careful, Machine. I really don't want to have to explain to anyone what you are. And why you're with me.
I've lied to enough people already.
I still can't get over this place. Building an anti-ballistic missile system way up here and then abandoning it. Huh.
And building it on top of an old forgotten gold mine, too.
Billy found out about it, but it's amazing other folks haven't.
Few people explore it and those that do keep it hush-hush. Maybe that's part of the reason why most folks don't know about it.
Then again, Billy and his friends have never come out of it. That's our job; we gotta go back in and find them.
Okay, c'mon, guys. Let's get inside.
Aaaoooo.
Guys, we have to go back in. Billy is somewhere in there. And since the cops don't care about homeless folks like him and his friends, there's no one else but us.
Ruff. Arf.
And no one can do what our Machine friend here can do. Since we can't tell anyone about the Machine, we're on our own.
I can't do it by myself.
Sankó, please. I need you. Okay?
♫ Lauren! Sankó! ♪
Yeah!
Gotta work on your vocabulary, Machine. Just saying 'Lauren' and 'Sankó' isn't a recipe for communication!
Arf! Arf!

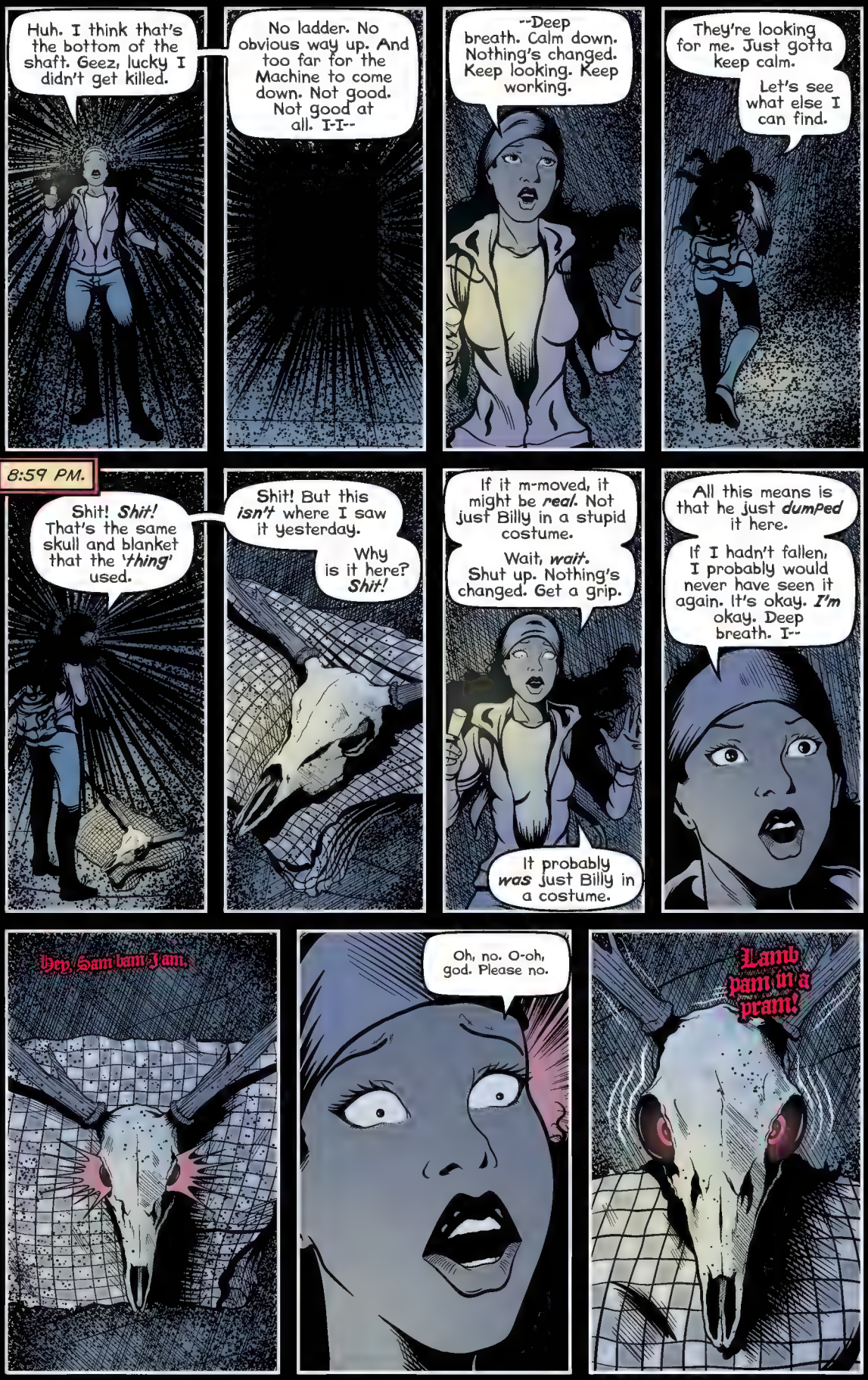

Okay, doesn't look like anyone else has been here since yesterday. Good.
But it's creepy as fuck. Easier to talk about going back in from the safety of the rooming house.
Now that we're here? I dunno. There's something about this place. And then there's that thing we saw.
Well, no use thinking about it. C'mon, let's see if we can retrace our steps and find the entrance to the old gold mine. It shouldn't be too hard.
8:21 PM.
JENNY FUCKED
Billy! Billy! I'm a friend! Please answer! Please!
Billy! Billy!
Nothing. Just like yesterday.
Figures.
8:33 PM.
I think I see the hole, guys!
There it is! Just like we left it! Okay, okay! Looks like the lantern that Billy and his friends left finally ran out of juice.
Okay, Machine. Now it's your turn. Please lift us down into the gold mine. Let's see if we can figure out where the hell Billy got to.
Lauren!

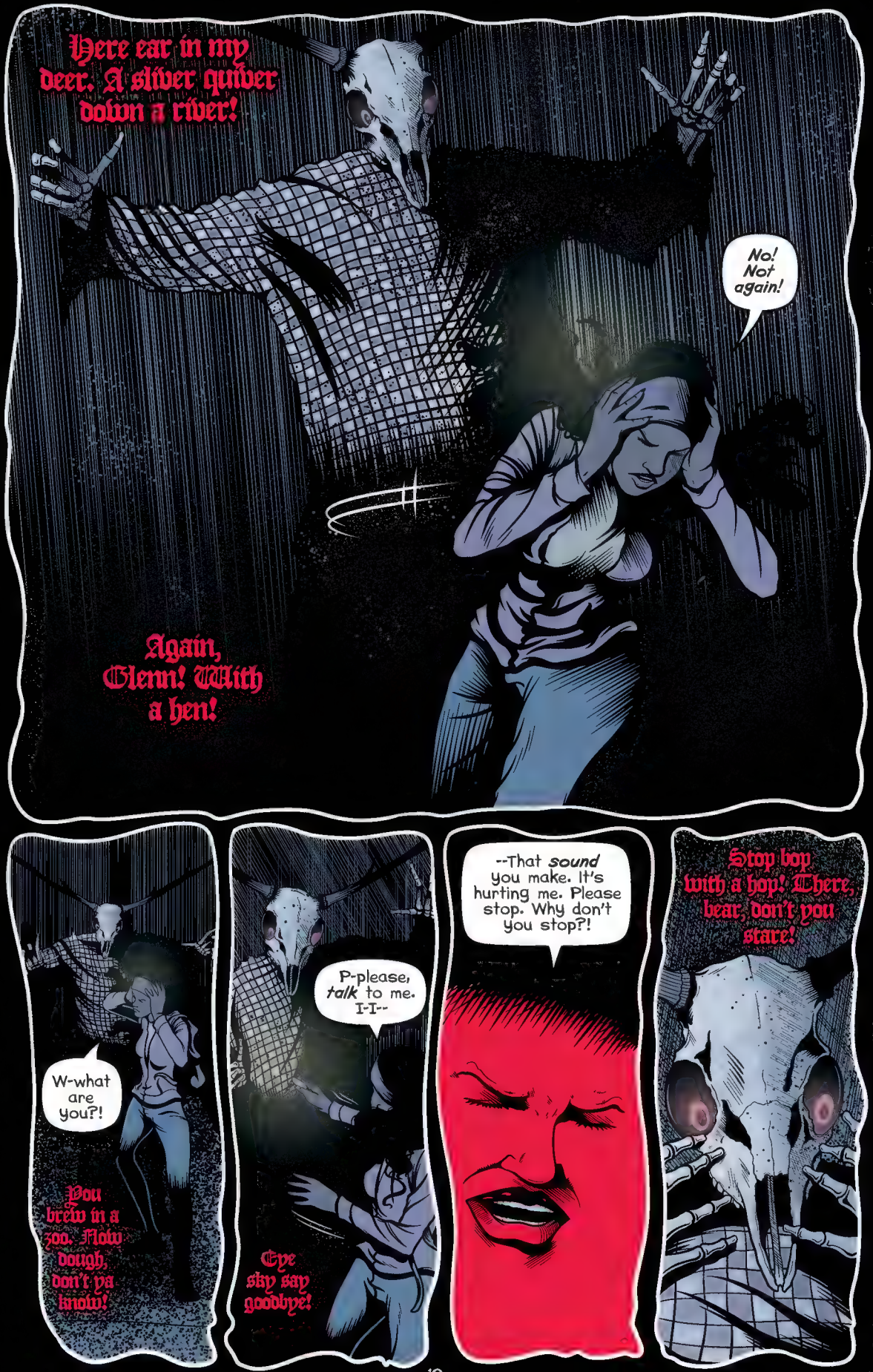

Billy! BILLY!
Nothing. Well, a few options. He's down here and can't hear me. I don't want to think too hard about the reason.
Or he and the others left. Or he's down here but doesn't want us to find him.
Probably because he found gold--
--and doesn't want to share it.
If he and his buddies *are* hiding from us, finding him is going to be hard.
Let's see if we can find any more evidence of him.
8:37 PM.
Hmmm...this is where we were when that 'thing' showed up.
No sign of it, though. No skull and blanket, either. Just the shaft down.
The oxygen is still not great, too.
Guys, I don't think we should go deeper.
Let's step around the shaft and follow the tunnel a bit longer.
Lauren!
You don't think we should?
Lauren!
Ruff! Ruff!
Look, I don't want to push our luck, either. But I've got *you* on my side.
If we haven't found them soon, we'll pack it in. Deal?
Laurrren!
Deal?!
Lauren.
Uh, I'll take that as a 'yes.'
C'mon, let's go.
THAK!

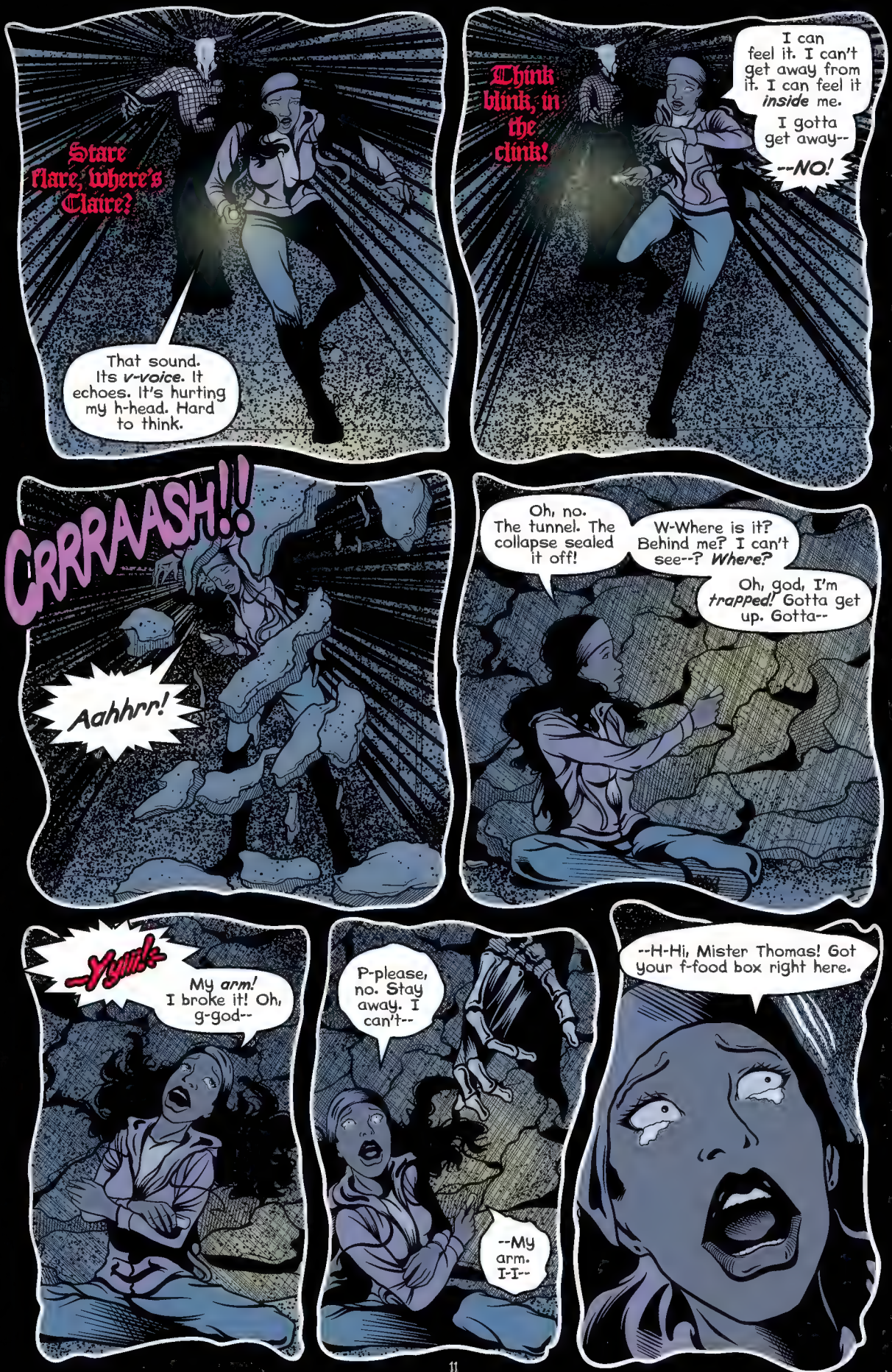
Cccrrrrash!
♫ Lauren! ♫
Shit!!
Arrrooooo! Ruff!
Wham!
Whunfff!
H-hustle--
--G-gotta hustle--
--I-I gotta h-hustle, Sankó.

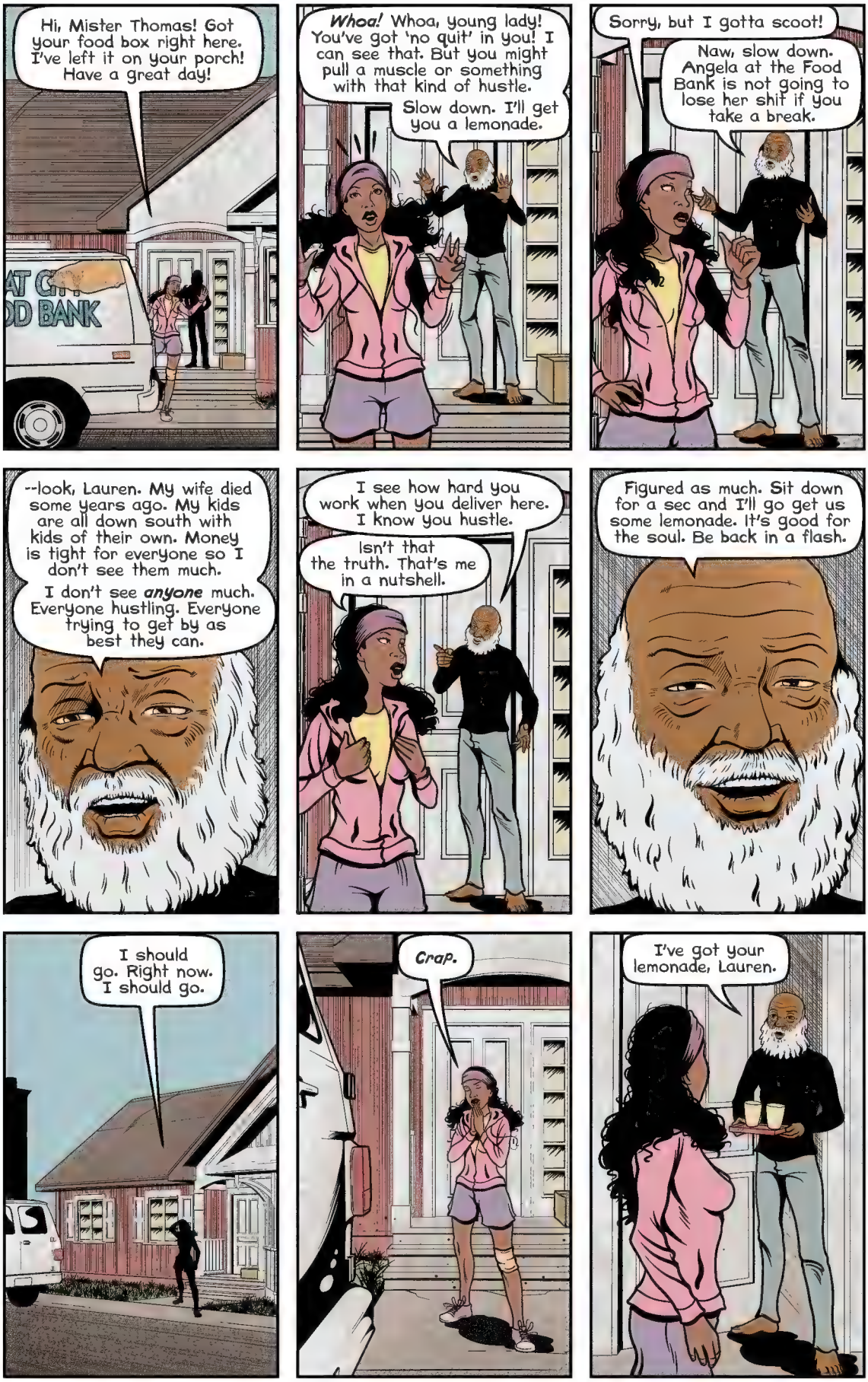

I gotta hustle, Sanko. We know Billy is lost in that mine under Safeguard. I need to get back there *tonight*, after my shift.
So deliveries have to go fast. Really fast!
Arrrooo.
WAREHOU
Jeep
"ALASKA" VAM 580
Yeah, okay, I know. I'm *always* racing. Yeah. But this time I have another reason.
Billy. You and your Machine friend know that, right?
WOOF! WOOF!
Uh-huh. You're a *very* opinionated dog, you know that?
Huffff.
Right, guys. Next delivery is to--
--shit--
--Mel Thomas on Raymond Avenue. *'Mister Talks-A-Lot.'* Crap.
Gonna have to make this quick or we'll be trapped talking for hours.

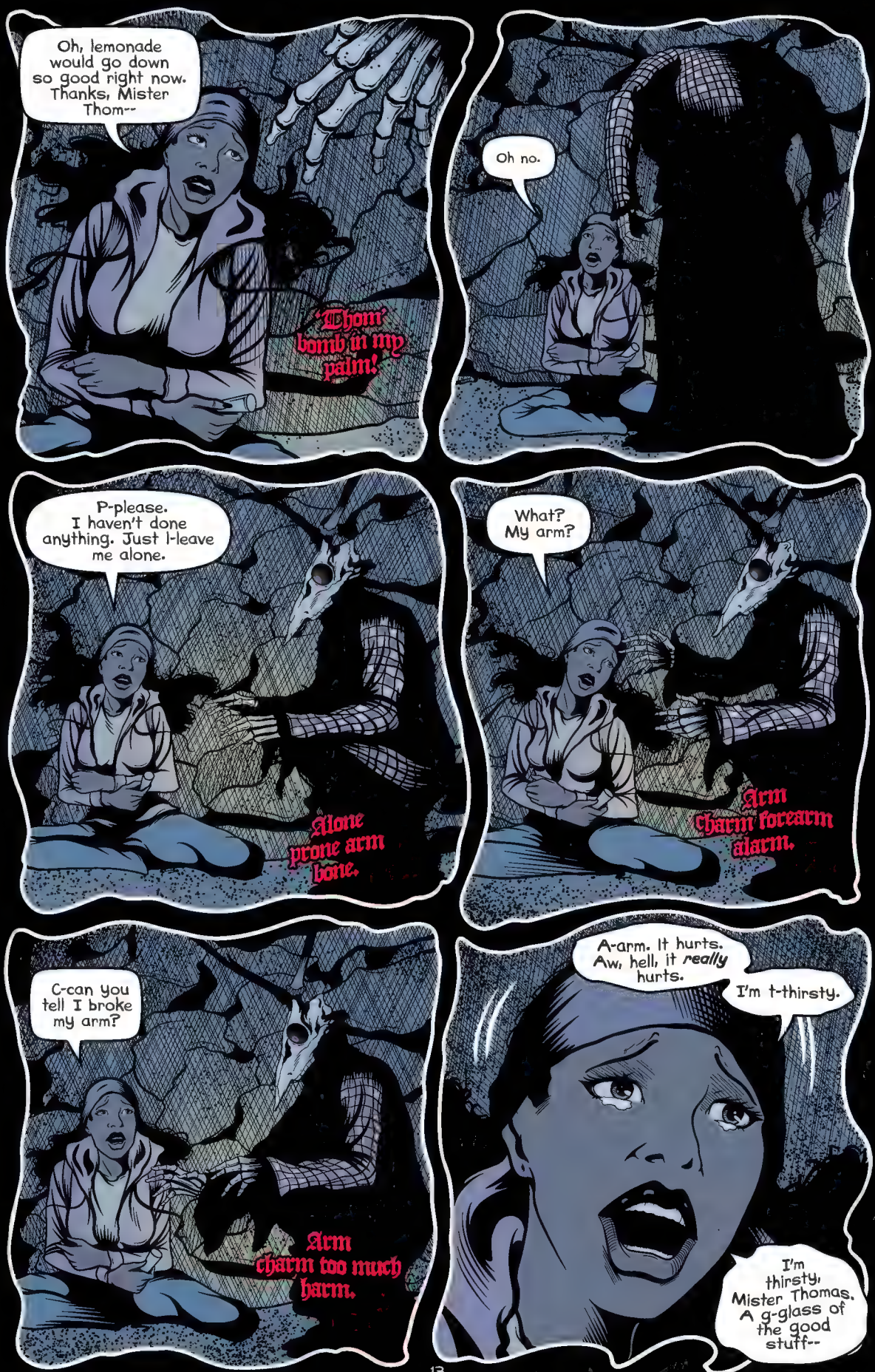
...'Mister Talks-A-Lot.' Crap. Gonna have--
Whew, I-I think I was dreaming there. Or remembering.
Oh, my head. Gave it quite a crack.
Ouch! Hurts, too.
No blood, though. That's something. But if I banged my head that good, I might have a concussion. Lovely.
Okay, okay. Still got my backpack. Still got my flashlight. And the air...?
Not bad. Not great, but not bad. I wonder how far I fell? Far enough that they couldn't follow me.
So this is not good, but Sankó and the Machine are above me. And I know they'll be trying to find me. So no need to panic.
At least not yet. The Machine needs sunlight, so if they can't find me, I'll--
--Right, stop that shit. Well, I can sit and wait, or I can try and figure out a way back up.
Sitting here is no good. I don't know how long the 'good' air will last. I've got to find a way out.
Carefully.
Maybe I'll find Billy, too.

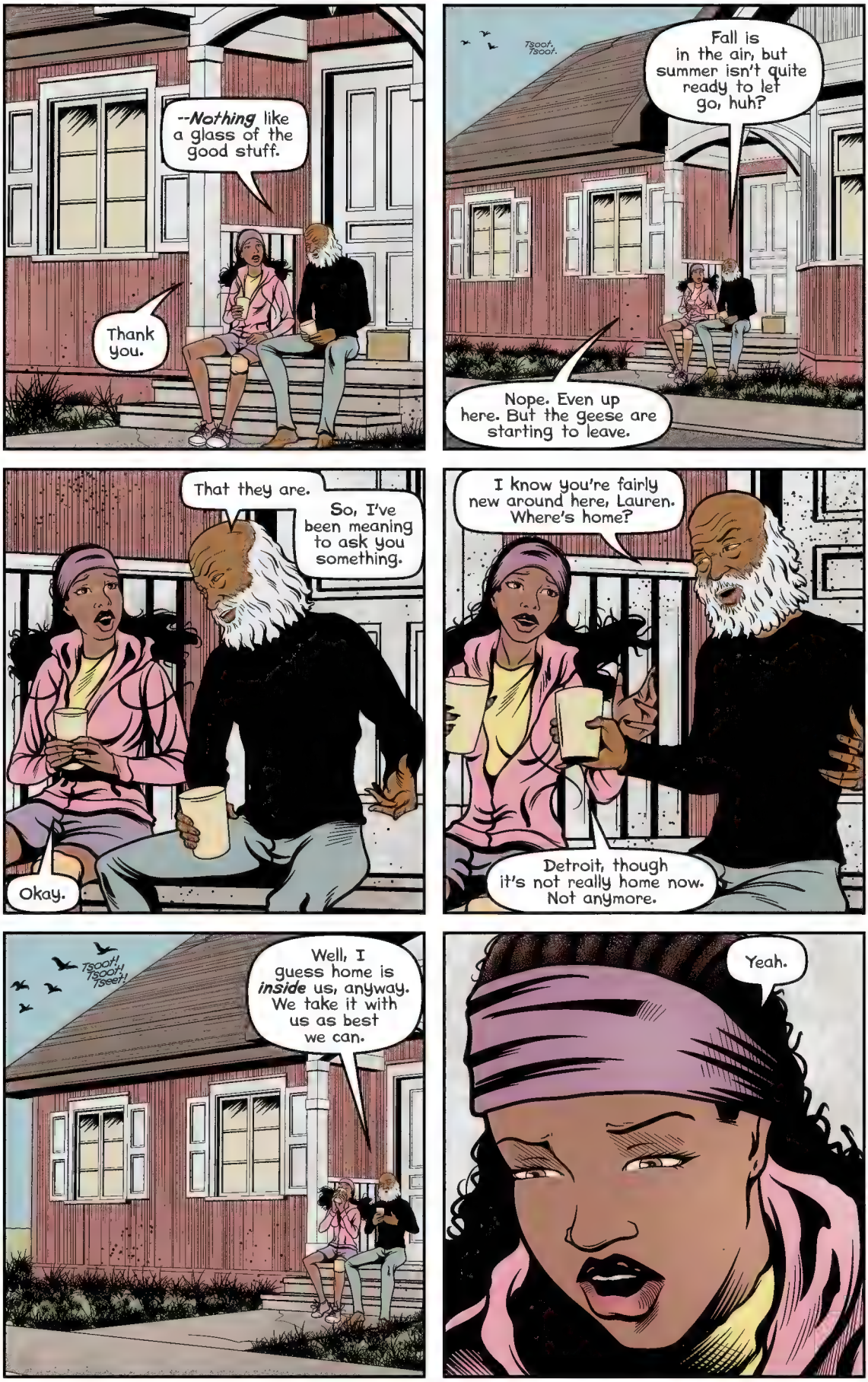

Huh. I think that's the bottom of the shaft. Geez, lucky I didn't get killed.
No ladder. No obvious way up. And too far for the Machine to come down. Not good. Not good at all. I-I--
--Deep breath. Calm down. Nothing's changed. Keep looking. Keep working.
They're looking for me. Just gotta keep calm.
Let's see what else I can find.
8:59 PM.
Shit! *Shit!* That's the same skull and blanket that the '*thing*' used.
Shit! But this *isn't* where I saw it yesterday.
Why is it here? *Shit!*
If it m-moved, it might be *real*. Not just Billy in a stupid costume.
Wait, *wait*. Shut up. Nothing's changed. Get a grip.
It probably *was* just Billy in a costume.
All this means is that he just *dumped* it here.
If I hadn't fallen, I probably would never have seen it again. It's okay. *I'm* okay. Deep breath. I--
Hey, Sam Iam, Iam.
Oh, no. O-oh, god. Please no.
Lamb pam in a pram!

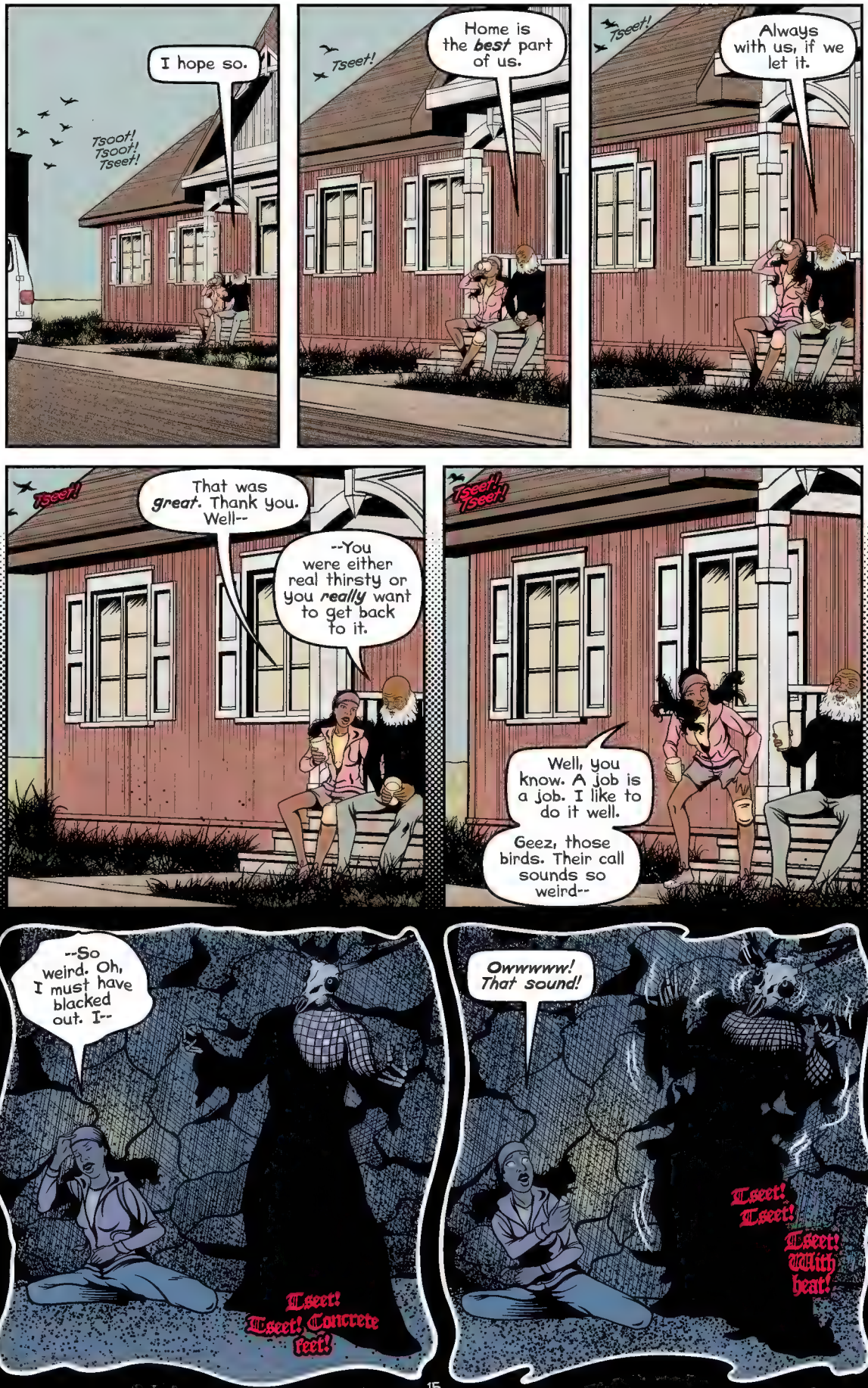

Here ear in my deer. A sliver quiver down a river!
No! Not again!
Again, Glenn! With a hen!
W-what are you?!
You brew in a zoo. Now dough, don't ya know!
P-please, talk to me. I-I--
Eye sky say goodbye!
--That sound you make. It's hurting me. Please stop. Why don't you stop?!
Stop bop with a hop! There, bear, don't you stare!

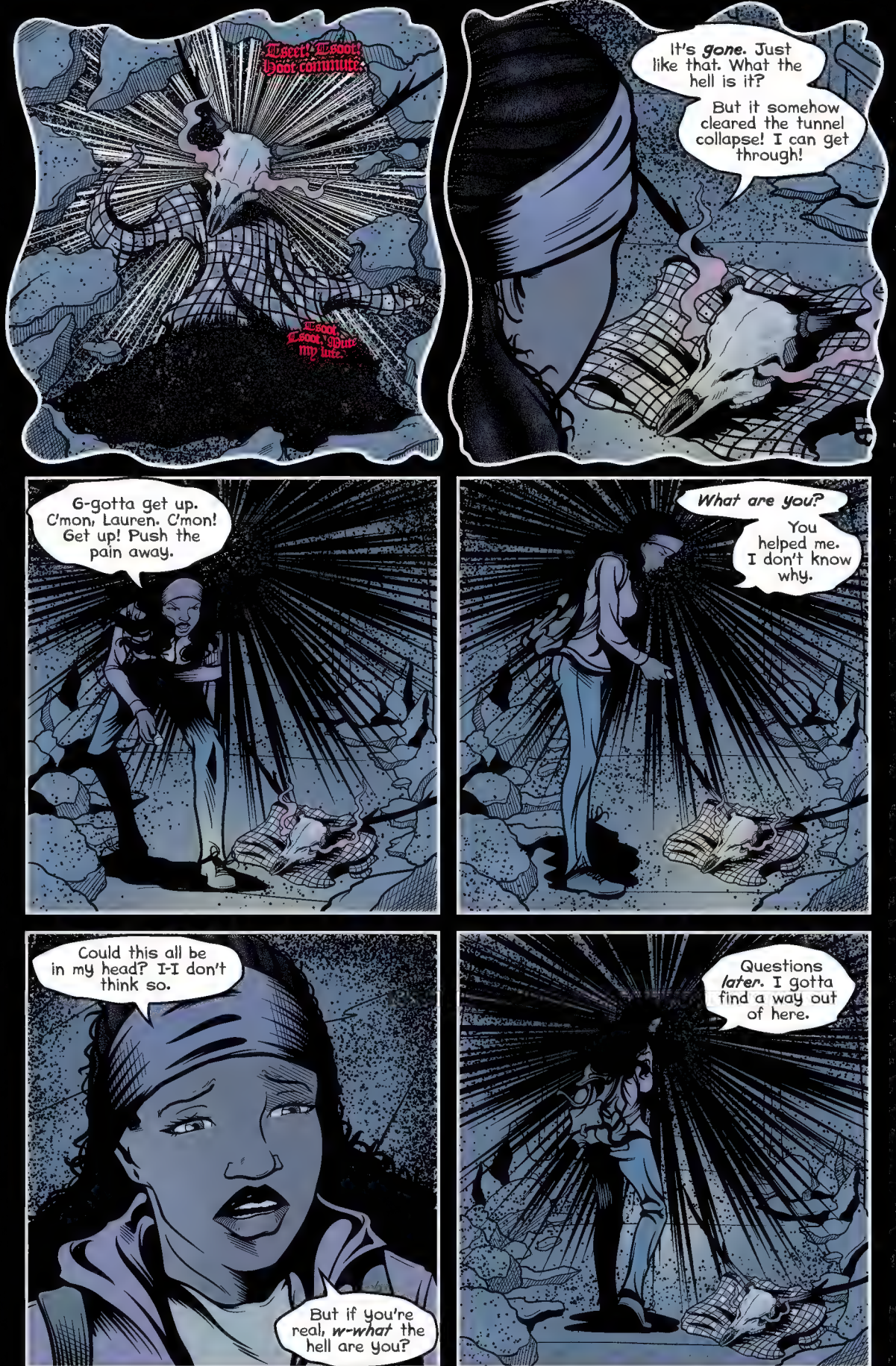

Stare flare, where's Claire?
That sound. Its v-voice. It echoes. It's hurting my h-head. Hard to think.
Thunk blink, in the clink!
I can feel it. I can't get away from it. I can feel it inside me.
I gotta get away--
--NO!
CRRRAASH!!
Aahhrr!
Oh, no. The tunnel. The collapse sealed it off!
W-Where is it? Behind me? I can't see--? Where?
Oh, god, I'm trapped! Gotta get up. Gotta--
--Yyiii!--
My arm! I broke it! Oh, g-god--
P-please, no. Stay away. I can't--
--My arm. I-I--
--H-Hi, Mister Thomas! Got your f-food box right here.


Hi, Mister Thomas! Got your food box right here. I've left it on your porch! Have a great day!
AT G...
OD BANK
Whoa! Whoa, young lady! You've got 'no quit' in you! I can see that. But you might pull a muscle or something with that kind of hustle.
Slow down. I'll get you a lemonade.
Sorry, but I gotta scoot!
Naw, slow down. Angela at the Food Bank is not going to lose her shit if you take a break.
--look, Lauren. My wife died some years ago. My kids are all down south with kids of their own. Money is tight for everyone so I don't see them much.
I don't see anyone much. Everyone hustling. Everyone trying to get by as best they can.
I see how hard you work when you deliver here. I know you hustle.
Isn't that the truth. That's me in a nutshell.
Figured as much. Sit down for a sec and I'll go get us some lemonade. It's good for the soul. Be back in a flash.
I should go. Right now. I should go.
Crap.
I've got your lemonade, Lauren.


Oh, lemonade would go down so good right now. Thanks, Mister Thom--
'Thom' bomb in my palm!
Oh no.
P-please. I haven't done anything. Just l-leave me alone.
Alone prone arm bone.
What? My arm?
Arm charm forearm alarm.
C-can you tell I broke my arm?
Arm charm too much harm.
A-arm. It hurts. Aw, hell, it *really* hurts.
I'm t-thirsty.
I'm thirsty, Mister Thomas. A g-glass of the good stuff--


--Nothing like a glass of the good stuff.
Thank you.
Tsoot, Tsoot.
Fall is in the air, but summer isn't quite ready to let go, huh?
Nope. Even up here. But the geese are starting to leave.
That they are.
So, I've been meaning to ask you something.
Okay.
I know you're fairly new around here, Lauren. Where's home?
Detroit, though it's not really home now. Not anymore.
Tsoot! Tsoot! Tseet!
Well, I guess home is inside us, anyway. We take it with us as best we can.
Yeah.

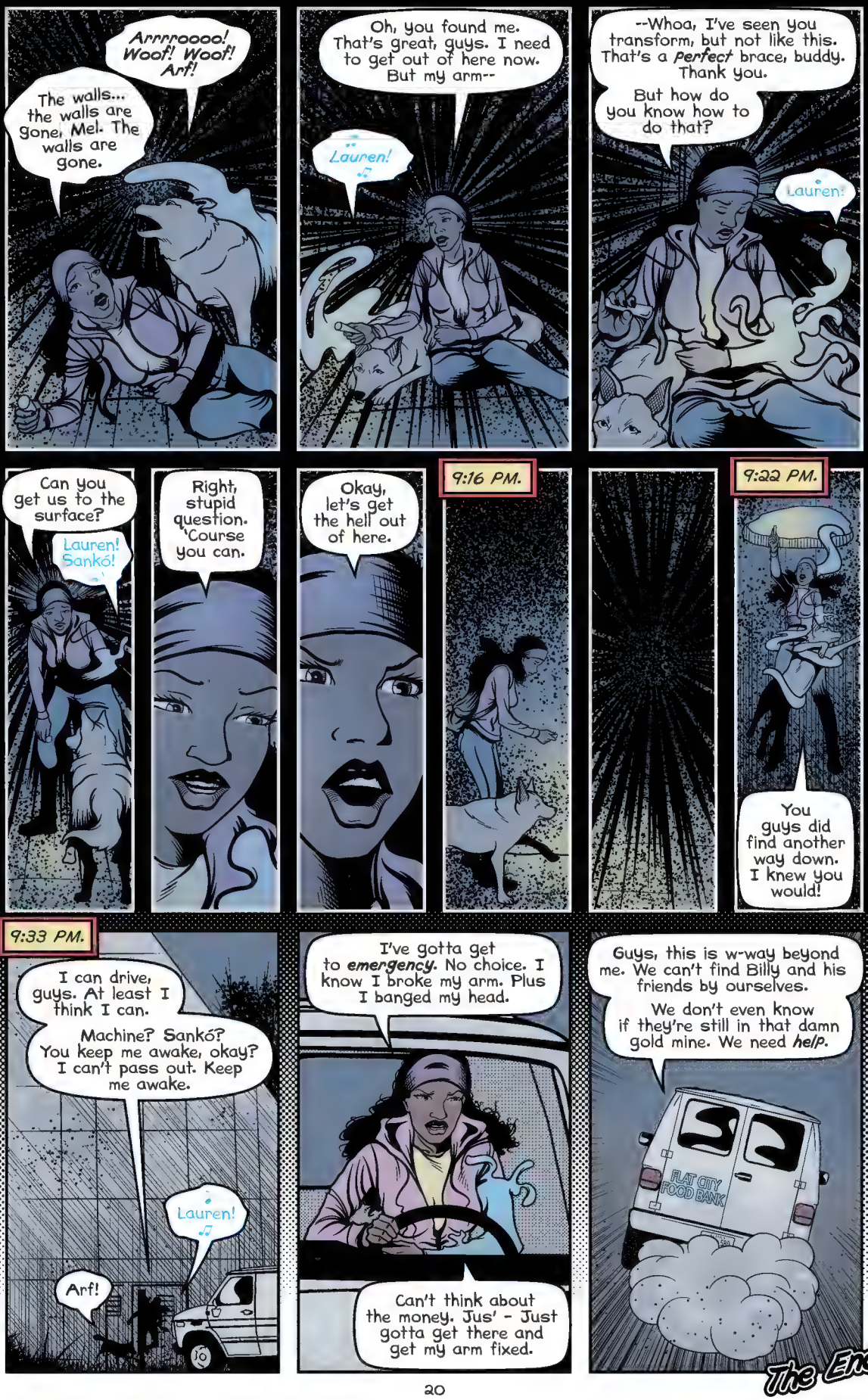

I hope so.
Tsoot! Tsoot! Tseet!
Tseet!
Home is the *best* part of us.
Tseet!
Always with us, if we let it.
Tseet!
That was *great*. Thank you. Well--
--You were either real thirsty or you *really* want to get back to it.
Tseet!
Tseet! Tseet!
Well, you know. A job is a job. I like to do it well.
Geez, those birds. Their call sounds so weird--
--So weird. Oh, I must have blacked out. I--
Tseet! Tseet! Concrete feet!
Owwwww! That sound!
Tseet! Tseet! Tseet! With heat!


Meet! Meet! Meet commute.
Meet. Meet. Meet my fate.
It's gone. Just like that. What the hell is it?
But it somehow cleared the tunnel collapse! I can get through!
G-gotta get up. C'mon, Lauren. C'mon! Get up! Push the pain away.
What are you?
You helped me. I don't know why.
Could this all be in my head? I-I don't think so.
But if you're real, w-what the hell are you?
Questions later. I gotta find a way out of here.

8:59 PM.
Gotta be a shaft up. A ladder. An elevator.
Something!
Ground is still rough.
9:08 PM.
Really rough.
Hard to walk. Hard to even see.
Each step is killing my arm. I gotta find a way outta here. Now!
Where's Sankō? Where's the Machine? Why h-haven't they found me yet?
Calm down. Calm--
Yyiii!
I-I gotta get back up. Get outta here. I got work to do. A job.
I've got a job... a job is a job. I like to do it well.

A job. Uh-huh. You like to keep busy.
Right.
Busy gives you *focus*.
Yup.
And the Food Bank helps a lot of folks.
Yup.
And you can help people through the Food Bank--
--Well, sure. I--
--but you can keep 'em at arm's length while you help them, too.
W-what?
I've watched you. You race around, busy busy, but not just 'busy work.' You're working hard. Helping folks.
And...?
Problem--the Food Bank lets you help people, but helping people might let them get close to you.
Solution--hard work. Why? Because hard work gives you emotional distance. And distance keeps everyone away.
I-I...
It's okay. You're *running*. I can see that. You're running from people.
No! Well, kinda, yeah, but no, I'm not running like that. No way.
Uh-huh. Running keeps you safe. Keeps *them* safe, too, I bet.
Yeah.
I have my reasons.
I don't doubt it. And I don't mean to pry. I really don't.
It's just hard not to notice when someone is new to the community, takes over a route, and is trying to help folks--
--but her *walls* are twenty feet high.
My walls *aren't* twenty feet high.
Uh-huh.
They're not!
Uh-*huh*.

They're--They're-well, ten feet high?!
Hahaha-ha! Well said, young lady. Well said!
I guess I should be more subtle, huh?
Subtlety isn't the problem. People need people, even when it scares them. Maybe especially when it scares them.
What if there are other things that scare them--me--more?
Well, then, you've got to place that. Take it from one who knows. Going through hard times is better with friends.
Doesn't make hard times hurt less, but friends can help ease the 'worry' load.
You've given me a few things to think about.
Uh-huh. But you gotta go.
I really do. I've got work.
Arf! Ruff!
I know you do.
And my dog. He's in the van. He wants to go.
Ruff! Ruff!
Of course. Off you go, then. Scoot!
Hah! Thanks for the lemonade, Mister Thom--Me!.
Arf! Aaooo!
Least I could do. Just remember--those walls are mighty lonely.
You might miss out if you keep 'em up.
I'll remember. Bye!


Arrrroooo! Woof! Woof! Arf!
The walls... the walls are gone, Mel. The walls are gone.
Oh, you found me. That's great, guys. I need to get out of here now. But my arm--
Lauren!
--Whoa, I've seen you transform, but not like this. That's a perfect brace, buddy. Thank you.
But how do you know how to do that?
Lauren!
Can you get us to the surface?
Lauren! Sankó!
Right, stupid question. 'Course you can.
Okay, let's get the hell out of here.
9:16 PM.
9:22 PM.
You guys did find another way down. I knew you would!
9:33 PM.
I can drive, guys. At least I think I can.
Machine? Sankó? You keep me awake, okay? I can't pass out. Keep me awake.
Lauren!
Arf!
I've gotta get to emergency. No choice. I know I broke my arm. Plus I banged my head.
Can't think about the money. Jus' - Just gotta get there and get my arm fixed.
Guys, this is w-way beyond me. We can't find Billy and his friends by ourselves.
We don't even know if they're still in that damn gold mine. We need help.
FLAT CITY FOOD BANK
The End

Next!

What will Lauren do? She's been hurt! Billy and his friends are still missing! And what about Chuck? Will Lauren fess up that she lied to him? What about the monster that Lauren keeps encountering? Is it real? Or is it all in her head? All this and more will be revealed in a tale intriguingly called...

THE UNIVERSE IS CHANGE!

2
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Wolf's Head
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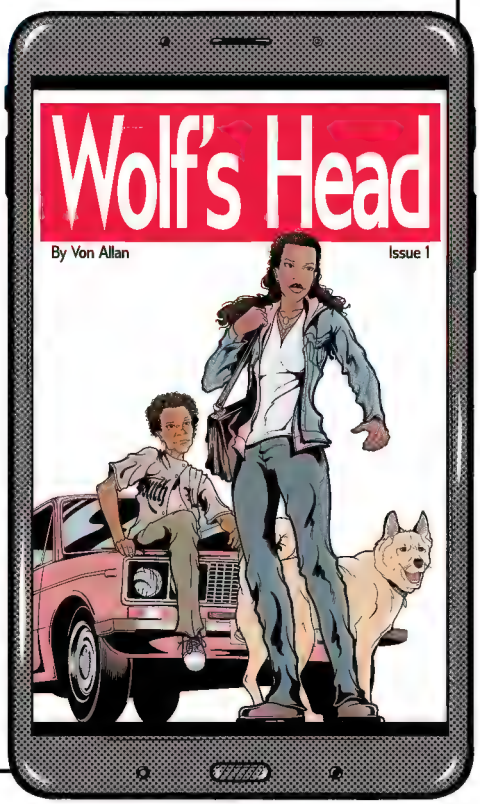


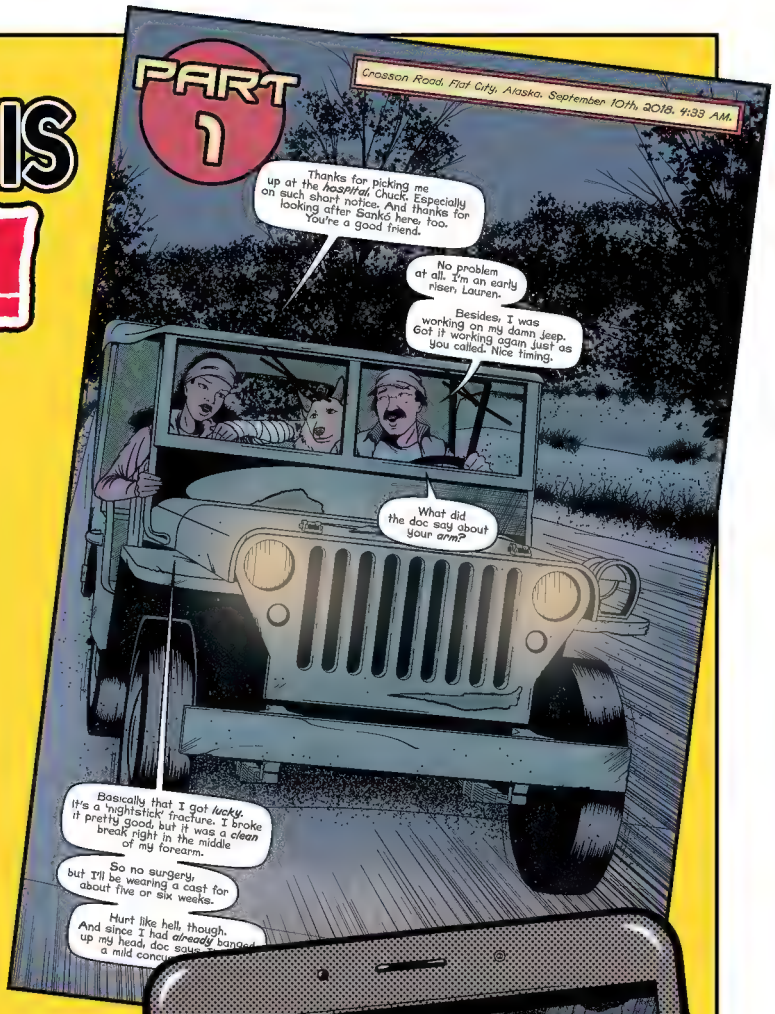
VON ALLAN

THE UNIVERSE IS CHANGE!

DURING AN ATTEMPT TO RESCUE A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO DISAPPEARED INTO AN ABANDONED GOLD MINE, ***LAUREN GREENE*** BROKE HER ARM... AND STILL COULDN'T FIND THEM AT ALL. LAUREN IS NOW FACED WITH PAIN, BILLS, AND THE PESKY FACT THAT THE PEOPLE SHE WAS LOOKING FOR ARE ***STILL*** LOST.

IF THERE'S ***ANY*** HOPE OF FINDING THEM, LAUREN HAS TO LEARN TO ASK FOR HELP. BUT TRUSTING OTHERS IS THE ONE THING THAT IS ***NOT*** EASY FOR HER.

WITH TIME RUNNING OUT, WILL LAUREN ENTER THE MINE ALONE? OR CAN SHE GET OVER HER ISSUES, FIND A TEAM TO GO BACK INTO THE MINE, AND FACE DANGER... ***TOGETHER?***


PART 1
Crosson Road, Flat City, Alaska. September 10th, 2018. 4:33 AM.
Thanks for picking me up at the hospital, Chuck. Especially on such short notice. And thanks for looking after Sanko here, too. You're a good friend.
No problem at all. I'm an early riser, Lauren.
Besides, I was working on my damn jeep. Got it working again just as you called. Nice timing.
What did the doc say about your arm?
Basically that I got lucky. It's a 'nightstick' fracture. I broke it pretty good, but it was a clean break right in the middle of my forearm.
So no surgery, but I'll be wearing a cast for about five or six weeks.
Hurt like hell, though. And since I had already banged up my head, doc says

Terrific guest stars include...

MAGGIE VRAIC! ONE HELLUVA QUIRKY CAT RESCUER!

FANG TING HIM! A BOUNCER! A FIGHTER! AND SHE HAS A HEART OF GOLD!

FOOLBERT BONG! DRUGS? CHECK! DEALING? CHECK! FEISTY? CHECK!

CHUCK FREIGHT! A LOVER OF GOLD! AND A GUY WHO HAS YOUR BACK!

Also! YOUR OLD FAVORITES ***SANKO*** AND ***THE MACHINE!***

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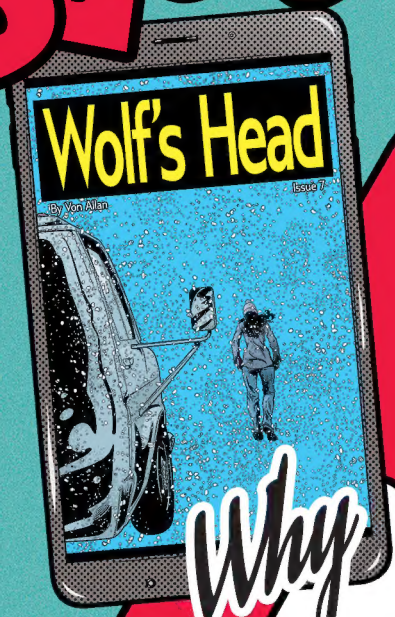

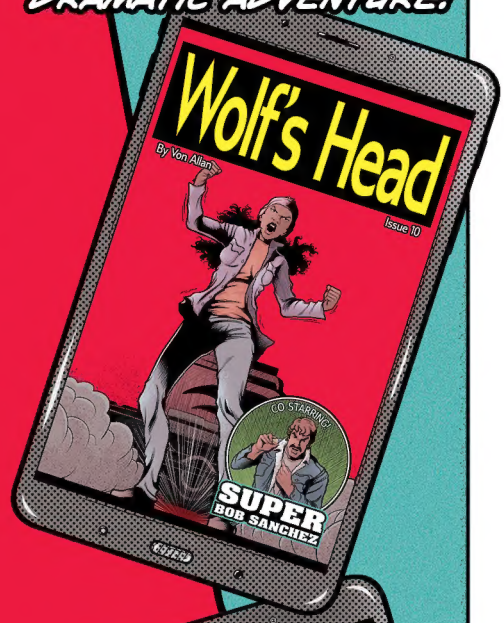

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BY VON ALLAN
EDITED BY SAM BOSWELL

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